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FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5287  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SARAJEVO 000161

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR(DICARLO), EUR/SCE(HOH,FOOKS); NSC FOR  
BRAUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/18/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [YI](#) [SR](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR REACTION TO  
KOSOVO STATUS DECISION

REF: A. STATE 5652

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 117

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas L. McElhaney. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Over recent months RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik has adopted an increasingly confrontational stance with the international community. Although he has steered clear of redlines, Dodik has repeatedly linked Kosovo independence with the status of the Republika Srpska (RS). In this context, the announcement of an Ahtisaari final settlement for Kosovo has the potential to trigger destabilizing actions by Dodik, and other Bosnian political leaders, advancing the cause of RS autonomy and weakening the state-level structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since the announcement of the Ahtisaari timeline, we have engaged in preventative diplomacy with Dodik and other Bosnian leaders. Most have said the right things in private. However, in light of Dodik's past reckless public comments the prospects for adventurism in the RS are high. This cable examines a range of scenarios, and options for possible USG responses. While we consider unlikely the most destabilizing scenarios, including violence and referenda on RS status within Bosnia, we have nonetheless examined a spectrum of possible outcomes in order to stimulate thinking about possible action should the situation take a turn for the worse. We believe that early and forceful U.S. messages, combined with a robust use of public diplomacy tools, should keep RS politicians from precipitating a crisis. However, we cannot discount, and should be prepared for, the need for more punitive measures.  
END SUMMARY.

Background

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[1](#)2. (C) Bosnian Serb political leaders, notably RS PM Milorad Dodik, have rhetorically linked Kosovo independence to the status of the Republika Srpska (RS) in the past. Dodik's comments, as well as those of other leading Bosnian Serb politicians, have generally described how Bosnian Serbs might react to Kosovo independence, including the possibility it could increase support among the RS public for secession, much as Kosovo has been separated from Serbia. We suspect most of these observations were intended, at least in part, to support Belgrade's efforts to derail or delay Kosovo independence by raising fears within the international community about the potential destabilizing impact it would have in Bosnia. Nonetheless, they were made in the context

of rising nationalist tensions in Bosnia fueled largely by an irresponsible public debate about RS independence, which was sparked by the May 2006 Montenegrin referendum and Bosniak Tri-Presidency member Haris Silajdzic's exploitation of the failure of constitutional reform for political purposes during the October 2006 election.

#### State Level Leaders Constructive

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¶13. (C) For several months, we have engaged Bosnian Serb political leaders, particularly Dodik, strongly underlining USG expectations that they refrain from making Kosovo independence a domestic political issue. All have pledged privately to take a constructive approach, but they have also asserted that they will face significant public pressure to comment on a Kosovo independence decision. More recently, the Ambassador met with all three members of the Bosnian Presidency during the week of January 15 to discuss the Ahtisaari timeline (Ref A). Serb Presidency Chairman Nebojsa Radmanovic (of Dodik's SNSD) told the Ambassador that he considers Kosovo to be a "matter between Serbia and the international community" and added that while Bosnian Serb politicians could not realistically be expected to endorse Kosovo independence, they also would not use the issue to advance nationalist goals. Encouragingly, incoming Serb Prime Minister Nikola Spiric publicly downplayed any link between Kosovo independence and the RS's status on January 17. Both Silajdzic and Zeljko Komsic, the Bosniak and Croat members of the Presidency respectively, also told the Ambassador they would take a constructive approach and seek to downplay the issue with their constituencies.

#### Dodik Remains a Problem

SARAJEVO 00000161 002 OF 004

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¶14. (C) Despite these private pledges, we believe an Ahtisaari recommendation for Kosovo independence has the potential to destabilize Bosnian politics, at least in the short-term. Silajdzic, despite his pledge to the contrary, has a history of making deliberately inflammatory statements designed to provoke irresponsible reactions from Bosnian Serbs. Prior to the October 2006 election, Silajdzic's aim was winning the Presidency; today it is to create the conditions necessary to ensure that the international community remains in charge here. Even assuming Dodik's private assurances are genuine, his proclivity for bombastic statements and his seeming inability to exercise self-control when presented with a microphone are cause for concern. One such statement is enough to ignite a point/counter-point exchange with Bosniak nationalists that could precipitate a broader political crisis. More disconcertingly, Dodik has been increasingly willing to challenge the international community, including OHR's authority, and he and other Bosnian Serb leaders could decide to use Kosovo to justify problematic political rhetoric and behavior that could complicate our efforts to anchor the country in the Euro-Atlantic community.

#### Spectrum of Potential Problematic Behaviors

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¶15. (C) We are already engaged in preventative diplomacy, delivering clear messages to senior Bosnian political leaders, aimed at preventing Kosovo from infecting Bosnian politics. In addition to his meetings with Presidency members, the Ambassador will meet PM Dodik and SDS President Mladen Busic on January 25 and 26 to deliver a firm message outlining USG expectations that they refrain from reckless rhetoric and behavior in response to Ahtisaari's decision. However, we have also examined a range of possible statements/actions that Dodik and others might take in the wake of a Kosovo independence settlement and considered possible USG reactions to them. Bosnian Serb reactions to Kosovo are presented below from the most to the least likely,

and are linked to possible USG responses. The most egregious of these possibilities are admittedly unlikely, but our objective is to identify thresholds of action and preview appropriate responses in order to be able to take timely action to prevent an escalation. The proposals contained in the following paragraphs are notional only.

Likely

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¶6. (C) We expect Bosnian Serb citizens, RS-based media or RS-based civil society groups, such as veterans associations, to comment negatively on Kosovo independence. Some of these statements undoubtedly will be irresponsible and include calls for actions that are inconsistent with Dayton. We will make use of traditional public diplomacy tools to shape public opinion here. Though we should not expect RS government officials or Bosnian Serb political leaders to embrace Kosovo independence, we can and should hold them to a higher standard than we hold their constituents.

-- RS Criticism of Kosovo Independence: Our concern should be statements from Dodik and others that implicitly encourage Bosnian Serbs to embrace the logic: "if Kosovo independence, why not the RS?" More problematic would be tacit support from the RS government and/or Bosnian Serb political leaders for protests by ordinary Bosnian Serb citizens.

-- Statements Explicitly Linking Kosovo Independence with the Status of the RS: To date, most of the referendum talk from Dodik and others has been linked to Montenegrin independence and election-related attempts to turn out the nationalist vote. That could change after Ahtisaari announces his decision. At its most basic, this might include "observations" about the similarities between Kosovo and the RS or comments "explaining" how Bosnian Serbs feel as opposed to outright calls for a change in RS status.

¶7. (C) Possible Responses: We believe strongly worded private and/or public statements from the Ambassador, as well as senior Washington officials, would be appropriate in order to

SARAJEVO 00000161 003 OF 004

prevent these types of statements from escalating into more problematic rhetoric/actions. We would work to coordinate any response with OHR and our European partners, but Dodik has demonstrated his willingness to defy OHR and is often contemptuous of the EU. The Europeans, too, are hesitant to stand up to the Bosnian Serbs, preferring to hope issues soon blow over. Dodik remains responsive to forceful USG statements.

Less Likely

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¶8. (C) We judge the following rhetoric/actions less likely, but possible if public debate on Kosovo gets out of hand, or if one accepts the view that Dodik and other RS politicians could see Kosovo independence as a vehicle for advancing an anti-Dayton agenda.

-- Proposal for a Referendum on Police Reform: Though not directly linked to Kosovo or RS status, it is probable that a police reform referendum would quickly become a de facto referendum on RS independence. Dodik has threatened such a referendum in the past. Doing so in the context of Kosovo would be more problematic.

-- Proposal for a Referendum on RS status: Regardless of the claimed context (i.e., as a response to comments by Bosniaks for the abolition of the RS), such a proposal would be particularly inflammatory in the immediate aftermath of Ahtisaari's decision.

-- Statements in Support of Violence/Unwillingness to

Maintain Civil Order: Dodik has privately committed to putting down any Kosovo-related civil unrest, and we believe he means it. Other Bosnian Serb political leaders may publicly excuse violence, however (i.e., SDS politicians seeking to exploit the difficulties civil unrest would pose to the SNSD-dominated government in Banja Luka).

-- Obstruction of State-level Institutions by Bosnian Serb Politicians.

¶9. (C) Possible Responses: In our judgment, each of these actions, except the proposal to hold a police reform referendum, would constitute a clear challenge to Dayton that, we believe, should trigger serious consideration of a Bonn Powers removal as well as several measures by the USG from among those outlined in paragraph eleven below. According to OHR, the proposal to hold a police reform referendum is technically legal under Dayton. In this instance, we believe a coordinated message from senior officials in PIC capitals coupled with private warnings would be necessary.

Least Likely  
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¶10. (C) Finally, though we judge it highly unlikely, post-Kosovo independence developments in the RS could defy expectations and take a dangerous turn. This might manifest itself in the actions described below.

-- Refusal by Dodik to Comply with a Bonn Powers Removal: In his January 17 GLOBUS interview, Dodik implied he would do just that should the HighRep act against him or others in the RS government.

-- Concrete Preparations for a Secession Referendum in the RS: This could include the circulation of petitions, preparations for a vote, or consideration of referendum legislation in the RS National Assembly.

-- RS Withdrawal from/Boycotting of State-level Structures: At its most extreme, this could include withdrawing troops from the Bosnian armed forces or reconstitution of the RS armed forces. More likely would be attempts to reclaim competencies granted to the State or implementation of policies deliberately designed to undermine State-level structures.

¶11. (C) Possible Responses: In our view, such steps would require use of Bonn Powers, including removals, as well as

SARAJEVO 00000161 004 OF 004

rapid, unilateral and forceful USG action. USG measures we judge appropriate could include: 1) Suspension or termination of USAID grants in the RS, particularly NDI's assistance to SNSD; 2) Findings of visa ineligibility per INA 212(f); 3) Recommendations for OFAC asset freezes for individuals or parties; and, 4) Urging EU missions to implement similar penalties such as a Quint visa ban or EU asset seizures.  
MCELHANEY